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SUBJECT: SUDAN: JUNE 24 ABDULWAHID MEETING WITH SE NATSIOS

REF: PARIS 2820

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d).

1 (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT. Special Envoy for Sudan Andrew Natsios on June 24 met with Abdulwahid el-Nur, leader of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM). SE Natsios repeatedly asked Abdulwahid to participate in the Kenya conference organized by the Swiss-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD), as it is the facilitator the U.S. supports as the most neutral among other possible mediators such as Eritrea, Libya, or the many others currently proposed. Abdulwahid said that he would not participate in the Kenya conference without first meeting individually with other rebel leaders to unify them. He said he is the only/best rebel leader to do this, and asked for time and support from the USG to allow him to accomplish these objectives. SE Natsios told Abdulwahid that he was welcome to discuss his own proposals for the Kenya conference with Andrew Marshall of the CHD, but that the USG would not support any of the leaders directly. SE Natsios told Abdulwahid that he had worked very hard to hold back all the other competing negotiating fora while this Kenya conference was given a chance to work, and that Abdulwahid and the other leaders were the ones standing in the way of the rebel groups coming together so they could then negotiate effectively with the Sudanese Government. The meeting was rather contentious; Abdulwahid, perhaps nervous about his leadership position and fearing that the Kenya meeting could dilute his power, was dug-in in his views (an assessment shared by Presidency Africa advisor Bruno Joubert, reported refTel). END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

¶2. (SBU) Special Envoy for Darfur (SE) Andrew Natsios met on June 24 with SLM leader Abdulwahid el-Nur. Also present were SE Chief of Staff Andrew Steinfeld, Conoff Nathan Jones (notetaker), and Michel Arditti, Abdulwahid's representative in Paris from Urgence Darfour.

¶3. (C) SE Natsios began by noting that the political situation in Sudan generally and Darfur specifically was getting progressively worse. Any delay in negotiating a political agreement on Darfur would only accelerate this trend and increase the potential for civil war across Sudan by the time elections are held in 2009. The Sudanese Government has been encouraging Arabs from neighboring countries, Chad in particular, to move into Darfur, even giving them Sudanese citizenship and allowing them to take over lands belonging to the African ethnic groups currently in the refugee camps. The Sudanese Government hopes that this new development, coupled with political redistricting, will consolidate its power in the elections in 2009.

¶4. (C) Abdulwahid asked for USG assistance to give him time and resources to consolidate his support among the different rebel groups. He stated repeatedly that the CHD conference in Kenya would not succeed, and that each rebel leader would use it, and any media present, to fight for leadership of the people of Darfur. Abdulwahid said that he has a large amount

of support on the ground in Darfur and among the rebel military commanders, and that he remains in daily contact with them.

15. (C) SE Natsios responded that Abdulwahid,s influence in Darfur was now in question, and that Abdulwahid may no longer have the best sense of the situation on the ground and who there still supports him. SE Natsios also said that the USG especially cannot support any single rebel leader or military commander. The USG role at this point was to support the Kenya conference as a neutral forum, with no media or members of the Islamist JEM rebel group present to interfere. The conference would allow the political and military leaders of the SLM to find common ground and then be able to negotiate with the Sudanese Government as a unified body. Abdulwahid insisted that he needed to personally meet with other leaders from Darfur individually to gain their support and only then would a conference such as this work. Abdulwahid said he was the only one capable of bringing them all together, and asked for USG logistical and financial help and time to conduct these meetings on his own before a conference was held. SE Natsios said Abdulwahid had already had a year since the talks in Abuja; he had made no progress in unifying these groups, and there was no more time to wait.

16. (C) SE Natsios told Abdulwahid to discuss his plan to meet individually with rebel leaders with Andrew Marshall of the CHD to see what he and the CHD thought of it, and that the USG ultimately had no control over the conference or its budget. (NOTE: We understand that Marshall and Abdulwahid subsequently met in Paris on June 26. END NOTE.) SE Natsios said that the military commanders had largely overcome their differences during their meetings this spring in North Darfur, and that it was the political leaders from Darfur,

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including Abdulwahid, who are impeding progress now. Abdulwahid mentioned at one point that if the Abuja negotiations had worked properly, then he would now be the Senior Assistant to the President of Sudan, instead of Mini Minawi. SE Natsios said that the USG agrees with Abdulwahid on his long-term goals for Darfur, but that he needed to be more flexible in how those goals were reached. Michel Arditti (Urgence Darfour), largely silent to this point, echoed this statement, saying that some flexibility was perhaps necessary.

17. (U) SE Chief of Staff Steinfeld has cleared this message.

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